

# The Colonel's painter: Perronneau's portrait of Joseph Yorke<sup>1</sup>

NEIL JEFFARES



(II) Oil copy by Lambert (Warwick. Museum of The Queen's Royal Hussars, presented by Colonel C. E. Duff CB in 1905)

**GENEALOGY:** [Yorke](#)

**A**N OIL PORTRAIT by Jean-Baptiste Perronneau, now in the collection at Southside House, Wimbledon, has led to some confusions about its dating which are discussed in this essay. It depicts the soldier and diplomat Colonel the Hon. Joseph Yorke (1724–1792), of whose career there is an excellent summary in the DNB. For our purposes, the salient points are that he was the third son of the Lord Chancellor Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke. He had a distinguished military career as a very young man, at Dettingen, Fontenoy, Culloden and Laufeldt (1743–46) as aide-de-camp to the Duke of Cumberland. He served in various regiments, including the Coldstream Guards (1743 and from 1745 until 1755), the 1<sup>st</sup> Foot Guards (lieutenant-colonel 1745), 9<sup>th</sup> Foot (Colonel 1755–59), 8<sup>th</sup> Dragoons (1759–60), 5<sup>th</sup> Dragoons (1760–87). From 1749 to 1758 he was aide-de-camp to the king, although his role turned to diplomacy: he was secretary to the embassy at Paris 1749–51, and was then at The Hague, as

<sup>1</sup> This essay was first issued in June 2017, with revisions added in 2026. It may be cited as Neil Jeffares, “The Colonel's painter: Perronneau's portrait of Joseph Yorke”, *Pastels & pastellists*, <http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/PerronneauYorke.pdf>.

## [Jean-Baptiste Perronneau](#)

Joseph Yorke, Lord Dover (1724–1792)

Oil on canvas, 194x82.5 cm

1754

Southside House, Wimbledon

**PROVENANCE:** By descent to 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Hardwicke; his sale, London, Christie's, 27.vi.1924, Lot 145; 800 gns; Skilleter; Wildenstein by .xii.1924; acqu. 24.i.1929, \$19,000, Agnew's; held in stock at £4000; sold 12.ii.1937, £3000; Charles John Halswell Kemeys-Tynte, 9<sup>th</sup> Baron Wharton (1908–1969), Halswell Park, Bridgewater; given to Malcolm Munthe c.1948; the Pennington-Mellor-Munthe Charitable Trust

**EXHIBITIONS:** London 1954, no. 25 n.r.

**LITERATURE:** 1924 sale price reported in *Connoisseur* &c.; advertised *Burlington magazine*, .viii.1931, p. xxxiii; colour plate in *Apollo*, xxiv, .vii.1936, p. 17, with anonymous discussion on p. 52; discussed Staring 1959, “Hollandse werken van Liotard en Perronneau. Een nalezing”, *Oud Holland*, lxxiv, 1959, pp. 230f, n.r.; Fiorella Sricchia Santoro, “Arte italiana e arte straniera”, in Giulio Bollati & Paolo Fossati, eds., *Storia dell'arte italiana*, 1980, iii, p. 164, fig. 217, as c.1761; Barbara Wertheim Tuchman, *The first salute*, 1989, p. 112 repr. (as from NPG); Dominique d'Arnoult, *Jean-Baptiste Perronneau ca. 1715–1783*, Paris, 2014, no. 214 P repr.

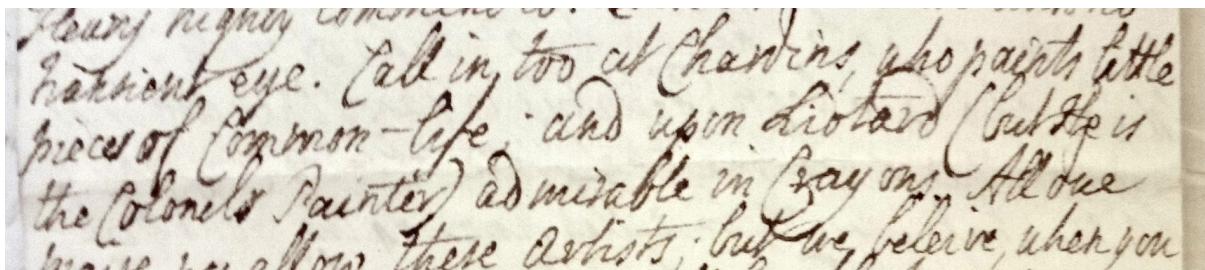
**RELATED WORKS:** (I) Anonymous engraving with changes, *Westminster magazine*, .v.17870.

minister from 1751, then ambassador from 1761 to 1780 – the longest single posting of any British diplomat of that era. He became a knight of the Bath in 1761, and in 1788 was made a peer, as Baron Dover.

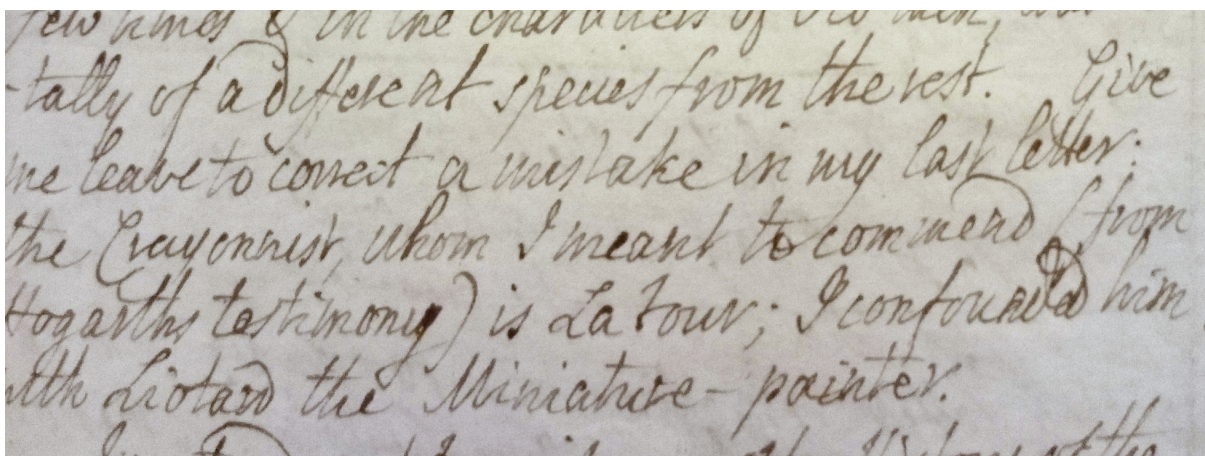
His historical importance relates to his position at The Hague, which, in the build up to the Seven Years War, was the centre of diplomatic intrigue. For his principal opponent, see my much longer article on the [marquis de Bonnac](#) which includes the imposing pastel exhibited in Paris by Louis Vigée in 1752, just before Bonnac's arrival at The Hague. Diplomacy took many forms: and a competition in portraiture was not unknown.

Of Yorke's personal character, commentary was consistent: James Boswell thought that "he seemed so anxious lest people should not know that he was an Ambassador that he held his head very high and spoke very little"; while another witness, Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, noted that "his manners and address had in them something formal and ceremonious."

Yorke's family were sophisticated Whig landowners with a serious interest in the arts and an intimate knowledge of the latest fashions in Paris. Thus Yorke's sister, Lady Anson, was an amateur pastellist; while when her husband Admiral Lord Anson was in Paris in June 1748, she wrote to him with lists of souvenirs to buy for their friends, including crayons for the Duchess of Bedford. In a letter the following year, the connoisseur Daniel Wray wrote to their father to give advice on the fashionable things to do in Paris, including this advice:



Two weeks later he corrected himself:



Hogarth, we know, visited France in 1743 and 1748, and would have known both La Tour and Liotard, so "the Colonel's Painter" might conceivably refer to either, although no miniature by Liotard nor pastel by La Tour known today could plausibly represent the young Colonel Joseph Yorke. While in Paris Yorke had moved in the highest society (his letters express disapproval of Mme de Pompadour's acting, while he regarded Voltaire as "mad as a Bedlamite").

When in late 1761 Horace Walpole made a visit to the house in St James's Square of Yorke's eldest brother Lord Royston, he found, in addition to a portrait of Lady Anson in crayons by "a

French painter, lately here”, a portrait of Sir Joseph “painted in France” on the ground floor. Hanging among oils and full length portraits, that is unlikely to be a pastel as the La Tour would be; nor does it seem likely that Walpole would have omitted the opportunity to comment on a Liotard. It may therefore be the Perronneau, with “painted in France” a simple confusion.

Before turning to the Perronneau, we should also note the curious painting now in Wimpole Hall (National Trust), signed and date by the rather obscure Joseph Samuel Webster, 1770 (there is a brief [article](#) in [pastellists.com](#)), as after the Dutch painter Guillaume Spinny:



The original version<sup>2</sup> by Spinny was in a sale in 1920.<sup>3</sup> A similar portrait of a different sitter (Bertram Philip Sigismund Albrecht Rijksgraaf van Gronsfeld Diepenbroeck tot Impel) by Spinny is known (1759): it is evidently derived from Tocqué’s well-known 1748 portrait of Saint-Florentin (Marseille).



Webster certainly seems to have attached a head to the body, even though alterations were required, for example to incorporate the scarlet riband of the Order of the Bath. One wonders if this was a picture commissioned to send home to Yorke’s family.

<sup>2</sup> Not located by Alastair Laing at the National Trust when the Webster was acquired (email, 14.v.2017).

<sup>3</sup> London, Christie’s, 20.II.1920, Lot 70. It has recently been rediscovered (2026).

A miniature (of which two versions were made, passing through the lines of descendants branching from the marriages of two daughters of Yorke's niece Jemima Pole Carew, the de Morel and Somers Cocks families; one is now in the National Trust collection at Anthony) was once thought to be either by Alefounder or by Philip Jean: the discovery of an engraving of it at Wimpole confirms that Jean was the artist. It shows a much older General Yorke from about 1780, prominently displaying the star of the Order of the Bath:



In the *Westminster Magazine* for May 1780 appeared an anonymous engraved portrait of Sir Joseph Yorke, clearly based on a much earlier portrait (in fact the Perronneau discussed below, evidently the colonel's favourite portrait), but enhanced with the riband of the Bath billowing over his coat, as Boswell's account of his personality would lead one to expect:

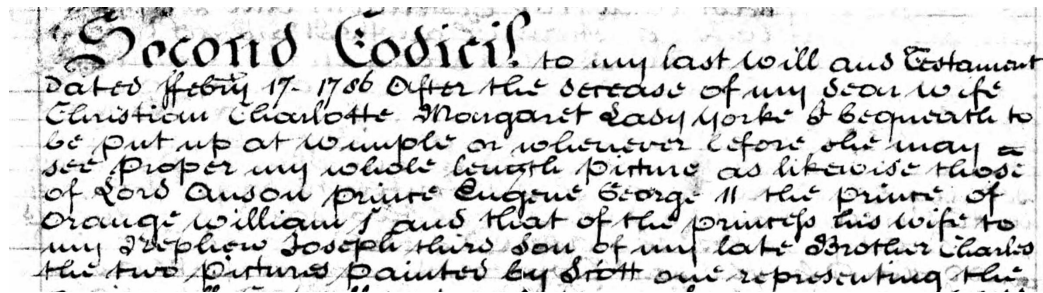
A winter scene reminds us of his posting.

It is uncertain if the Webster or the Perronneau was the portrait which passed to Sir Joseph's youngest brother James, Bishop of Ely, and was bequeathed by him to their nephew Admiral Sir Joseph Sydney Yorke in 1808:

Charles Yorke Esq. is given the portrait of  
his father and to my Dear Brother Capt.  
Joseph Sydney Yorke I give the portrait of  
his mother Lord Dover all which portraits  
are now hanging in the Lower Drawing  
Room at Ely Street & bequeath to the same  
House of the Widow, and =

\* \* \*

As far as is known at present, no other contemporary document survives concerning the Perronneau painting with the possible exception of the curiously imprecise reference in a codicil to Lord Dover's own will. With no children of his own, all his belongings remained in the family, but in this 1786 codicil he directed that "my whole length picture" be hung at Wimpole with other portraits (he goes into far more detail in his descriptions of the naval engagements in the paintings in his other bequests). No whole length of Lord Dover is known, but the inclusion of the legs in the Webster make this logically more likely to be picture than the Perronneau (although the Webster cannot have been the picture seen by Walpole in 1761, which sat happily among the other full length portraits):



**Second Codicil** to my last will and Testament dated feby 17. 1786 after the decease of my dear wife Christiana Charlotte Monaghan Lady York & Bequith to be put up at Wimpole or whenever before she may see proper my whole length picture as likewise that of Lord Anson prime Eugene George II the prime of Orange William I and that of the prince his wife to my nephew Joseph third son of my late brother Charles the two pictures painted by Sir J. Reynolds representing the

The Perronneau emerged for the first time from the Hardwicke family sale at Christie's, 27 June 1924, passing through the hands of several dealers before finding its way into the Southside House collection. The purchaser at auction was Skilleter<sup>4</sup> who bought it for 800 guineas before selling it on to Wildenstein; they in turn sold it to Agnew's for the remarkable sum of \$19,000 in January 1929 (just over £4000 at the time, equivalent to roughly £250,000 in 2017). Agnew's owned it until 1937, when they were finally able to sell it on, for only £3000, to Lord Wharton, joining the fine collections at Halswell Park.<sup>5</sup> When the estate was broken up c.1948, Wharton gave the painting to his friend, Colonel Malcolm Munthe.<sup>6</sup> While still with Agnew's, it was reproduced in colour in *Apollo* together with an interesting appreciation (July 1936, p. 52):



How, exactly, the French artist came to paint this sitter we have not been able to ascertain. Perronneau, who is better known as a pastellist, and in this respect only second to his slightly older contemporary Quentin de la Tour (1704-1788), is of the ancien régime, and stands in relation to his rival somewhat as Gainsborough to Hogarth, at least, in the sense that Perronneau and Gainsborough are the more feminine

<sup>4</sup> Apparently Frank Walter Thomas Skilleter (1865–1936), described as a fine art dealer in the 1911 census; his name appears on transatlantic passenger shipping lists for New York, but he is otherwise unknown.

<sup>5</sup> Information from Agnew's stock books, now in the National Gallery for whose assistance I am most grateful.

<sup>6</sup> For an account of the circumstances see the blog <https://halswellpark.wordpress.com/2015/12/17/halswell-sales-catalogues/>.

in their touch. This characteristic is more evident in Perronneau's pastels than in this oil painting, and in his pastels he is also seen as a better colourist than Latour, who was remarkable as an unflinching "actualist," if one may so describe an artist who is more concerned with accuracy than with beauty of design. Perronneau's portrait of Sir Joseph Yorke – who, incidentally, was an uncle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Hardwicke, who was painted by Romney as a boy — is unquestionably a brilliant and pleasing performance instinct with XVIIIth century elegance.

A black and white photograph taken around the same time shows the edge of the frame with a label attributing the work to Webster and dating it to 1770: evidently a confusion with the copy after Spinny, and suggesting both pictures shared the same provenance. (As the Webster measures 128x103 cm, they cannot however have shared the same frame.)

It was lent (anonymously) to the Royal Academy exhibition of European Masters 1954–55 where it was spotted by Adolph Staring, who wrote about it in an article in *Oud Holland* in 1959:

Merkwaardig, naast dit portret van internationaal, Frans type, is dat van Joseph Yorke, later baron Dover, vanaf 1751 gezant en sinds 1761 ambassadeur in Den Haag (tot 1780), dragend het cordon van de Bath-orde, waarin hij in 1761 was opgenomen. Yorke is afgebeeld in uniform tot halverwege de dijen, bijna van terzijde en langs de toeschouwer ziende, de linkerhand in het vest met de steek onder de arm en de rechterhand in de broekzak. Dit olieverfportret, dat in Londen in 1954/55 werd ingezonden door een ongenoemde eigenaar, zal wel zijn ontstaan in Den Haag ten tijde van de dubbele bevordering in 1761; de datering is onleesbaar. Helaas mocht ik geen vergunning ontvangen om het portret hier te reproduceren. Niemand, die het portret in Londen zag, zal er aan getwijfeld hebben of wij hier een Engelsman voor ons zagen, in de typisch Engelse voordracht van nonchalant, open en rustig zelfbewustzijn. Wij zien hetzelfde bij portretten van Engelsen door de Romeinse kunstmatador Girolamo Batoni, die soms Italiaanse grandezza en soms, blijkbaar op verlangen van de opdrachtgever, Engelse eenvoud en natuurlijkheid vertonen. Zo oefenen door de modellen de kunstvormen passend bij een bepaalde landaard invloed uit op die van een ander land.

He was unable to read the full signature or decipher the date, and concluded, on the basis of the presence of the riband of the Bath, that the picture must have been painted in 1761 or perhaps a little later. That remained the established view 20 years later, when Fiorella Sricchia Santoro reproduced it, curiously in the context of pastels by La Tour and Carriera, commenting

ancora piú attentamente Perroneau nei bellissimi ritratti che avanzano con i tempi nuovi sulla strada di una lucidezza davvero volterriana

Dominique d'Arnoult included it (with an old black and white photograph) in her 2014 catalogue raisonné (no. 214 P, pp. 278f), and, after analysing Perronneau and Yorke's movements during 1761, was unable to decide whether it was painted in London or The Hague.

But those accounts prompt certain questions. Firstly is the sitter really as old as 37 when he appears rather younger (and seems much older in the Webster and Jean portraits). Secondly it seems surprising that, with his particular distrust of the French, a British ambassador should choose to be portrayed by a peintre du roi of the country with which Britain was at war – Rouillé's declaration of hostilities had actually been placed in Yorke's own hands in 1756 (although a commission before that date might have been an exercise in diplomacy).<sup>7</sup> More objectively however the uniform can clearly be identified<sup>8</sup> as that of the Coldstream Guards, which Yorke left definitively when he was appointed colonel of a different regiment in 1755.

To answer these questions I examined the picture out of its frame in May 2017.<sup>9</sup> It has been recently relined and restored; an earlier conservator had taken the view that the riband of the order was a later addition, which has now been covered:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> A pastel kept in the private apartments might be possible, but a larger portrait such as this would surely have been intended for wider display. That strengthens the argument for it being the portrait Walpole saw, discreetly removed to Yorke's brother's house in London.

<sup>8</sup> My thanks to Chris Bryant for confirming this (email, April 2017).

<sup>9</sup> I am most grateful to Izabela Banasik, administrator at Southside House for arranging my inspection.



As for the dating, Staring may be excused (the wording remains very difficult to read):



It is possible to decipher this as (“t.c.” is for “très chrétien”, the official style for the king of France):

Perronneau peintre Du Roy t c

1754 a La Haie

Perronneau was reçu at the Académie royale on 28 July 1753. He proudly inscribed “Perronneau peintre du roy/1754 La Haye” on another portrait made in The Hague that year, but rarely used the title in his signatures after that. That portrait was the pastel of Jacob van Kretschmar (1721–1792), who had also fought alongside Yorke at Fontenoy nine years previously. Ironically van Kretschmar was also in England on 19 February 1761 when Perronneau and Yorke were, as we know from the will he made proved in the prerogative court of Canterbury by his widow in 1800.

Neil Jeffares

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<sup>10</sup> Reversibly, I am informed by the most recent restorer, who completed the work (oral communication, 16.IV.2017). The paint appears to have been near contemporary with the rest of the work and may well have been added by Perronneau himself on his second trip to The Hague in 1761.